

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission FY-97 Overview



Tribal and NWIFC staff collect samples from chum salmon during a test fishery conducted by the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

"We, the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, recognize that our fisheries are a basic and important natural resource and of vital concern to the Indians of this state, and that the conservation of this natural resource is dependent upon effective and progressive management. We further believe that by unity of action, we can best accomplish these things, not only for the benefit our own people but for all the people of the Pacific Northwest."

Preamble to the Constitution of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

Introduction

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) was created in 1974 by the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as a result of the U.S. v. Washington litigation that affirmed fishing rights reserved by the tribes in treaties signed with the federal government in the 1850s.

The commission's role is to assist the tribes in conducting orderly and biologically-sound fisheries and to provide member tribes with a single, unified voice on fisheries management and conservation issues. Member tribes are Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Puyallup, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Lower Elwha

Klallam, Skokomish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Makah, Stillaguamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Nooksack, Lummi, Quinault and Quileute.

The tribes select commissioners who develop policy and provide direction to NWIFC staff. The commissioners elect a chairman, vice chairman and treasurer. The commission's executive director supervises the staff that implements the policies and fisheries management activities approved by the commissioners. The NWIFC employs about 50 full-time employees in its Administration, Fishery Services, Habitat Services, and Information and Education Services divisions.

The Administration Division includes the executive director, director of finance and administration, fishery and legislative policy analysts and clerical and accounting departments.

The Fishery Services Division supports and promotes the fishery programs of member tribes by providing technical assistance, coordinating management programs and representing tribal management policies. The program is comprised of the Fishery Management and Planning Division, Quantitative Services Division and Enhancement Services Division, and provides services ranging from harvest management planning to database management and fish health.

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical and policy assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. In addition, the program coordinates tribal participation in forest management processes and conducts a statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program, among other programs.

The Information and Education Division provides comprehensive public relations services to member tribes. The division produces news releases, publications and videos, works with the media, coordinates and provides public presentations, develops and staffs educational exhibits at fairs and other events, and responds to numerous information requests from agencies, organizations and the public, among other activities.

FY-97 Overview

FY-97 brought many great challenges to western Washington treaty Indian tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

Of particular importance in FY-97 was continued participation in the joint state/tribal Wild Stock Restoration Initiative and associated long range planning. Much of the effort centered on development of a joint state and tribal Wild Salmonid Policy, which is near completion. The policy addresses a number of key issues surrounding wild salmonid management and conservation, such as harvest management, genetic conservation and appropriate uses of hatchery programs. The policy defines overall goals and objectives, as well as a set of guidelines for their implementation, and will also provide a consistent framework within which individual stock or watershed recovery plans can be developed.

Efforts continued in developing recovery plans for salmon and steelhead stocks identified as critical in a 1992 stocks inventory, as well as development of a comprehensive coho salmon management strategy and a statewide inventory and assessment of salmonid habitats.

The NWIFC dedicated considerable staff time to assisting the National Marine Fisheries Service in its effort to conduct status reviews of regional salmonid populations in response to petitions filed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Results of the Wild Stock Restoration Initiative will figure prominently in ESA decision-making processes.

As ESA status reviews moved forward, the NWIFC put forth tremendous effort in supporting the Endangered Species Act Secretarial Order, which was issued in the summer of 1997 by the secretaries of Commerce and Interior. The order defines the special relationship between treaty Indian tribes, the federal government and the ESA. It recognizes tribal sovereignty and provides a framework within which the tribes and federal government can work cooperatively to develop holistic recovery plans for species listed under the ESA.

FY-97 also saw further development of a new working relationship with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. In 1995, citizens of the state elected to replace the governor-appointed director with a commission composed of citizen representatives with the authority to name the

agency's director. The NWIFC continued dedicating time and effort to educate the commission and director about the tribal perspective on important fisheries management issues, such as the Wild Salmonid Policy and the state's coho mass marking program.

The tribes and state came to agreement on the mass marking of hatchery coho salmon in the spring of 1997. Treaty tribes had previously obtained a court order to stop the mass marking program — mandated by the state Legislature — because of its potential harm to a coastwide coded wire tagging program.

The idea behind mass marking is that a fin clip would enable sport fishermen to distinguish hatchery fish from wild fish in mixed stock areas, where fisheries have been restricted in recent years to protect weak wild stocks.

The tribes wanted to make sure the program was implemented properly. Specifically, the tribes were able to protect data that is gathered in the coastwide coded wire tagging program, which uses the same fin clip to designate fish carrying coded wire tags. The tagging program provides the data that is the foundation of domestic fisheries management in the region, and is also required under the Pacific Salmon Treaty between the U.S. and Canada.

Lack of a successfully-negotiated Pacific Salmon Treaty in FY-97 resulted in angry political rhetoric, claims of U.S. overfishing and a harmful "Canada First" fishing policy. As in past years when agreement was not reached under the treaty, tribal and non-Indian fisheries were managed responsibly. Indian and non-Indian harvests were taken from a portion of the run surplus to the escapement needs (the number of fish needed to spawn and perpetuate the run) of the stock.

A bright spot in resolving the impasse appeared in the appointment by both countries of two high-level representatives to make a fresh attempt at settling the salmon dispute. William Ruckelshaus, who served two terms as administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and University of British Columbia President and Chancellor David Strangway will attempt to reinvigorate a stakeholders process to resolve differences in the interpretation and implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

FY-97 Activities Summary

Following is a summary of activities by the NWIFC during FY-97:

Fishery Services

Fishery Management and Planning Division

The primary objective of the Fishery Management Planning Division is to provide technical assistance and coordination to member tribes in their annual and long-range fishery management planning activities. Activities during FY-97 included:

- Development of pre-season fishing agreements;
- Development of pre-season and in-season run size forecasts;
- Development and participation in stock monitoring programs;
- In-season fisheries monitoring;
- Assistance with data retrieval and analysis;
- Post-season fishery analysis and reporting;
- U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty technical assistance;
- Long-range planning/Wild Stock Restoration Initiative;
- Endangered Species Act issues;
- Pacific Fishery Management Council technical assistance;
- Shellfish management and technical assistance, such as assisting tribes in developing harvest management plans, setting up shellfish populations surveys, analyzing survey and harvest data, and developing and assisting with enhancement projects; and
- Coastal habitat coordination.

Quantitative Services Division

The Quantitative Services Division's objective is to assist tribal fishery management programs by providing relevant data, quantitative tools and analyses, and technical consulting services to tribal and NWIFC projects. Activities in FY-97 included:

- Providing assistance to tribal policy and technical staff on evaluation of management for chinook and coho salmon;
- Administering and coordinating the Treaty Indian Catch Monitoring Program. The program provides an agreed-upon harvest database that can provide hard catch statistics critical for fisheries management planning and allocation;
- Providing computer set-up, maintenance, troubleshooting, and consultation services;
- Providing statistical consulting services for pre-season abundance forecasts and in-season run size update models;
- Conducting data analysis of fisheries studies and developing study designs;
- Updating and evaluating fishery management statistical models and databases; and
- Coordinating the tribal fisherman identification and boat plaque program.

Enhancement Services Division

The Enhancement Services Division provides tribal support services in enhancement planning, hatchery coordination, coded wire tagging, and fish health. Activities included:

- Coded wire tagging of 2.64 million fish at tribal hatcheries to provide information critical to fisheries management;
- Fulfilling tribal requests for coded wire tag analysis;
- Hosting fish culture workshops for tribal hatchery technicians;

- Providing fish health services to tribal hatcheries in the areas of juvenile fish health monitoring, disease diagnostics, adult health inspections and vaccine production;
- Providing assistance to tribes in the development and implementation of management and harvest plans for marine mammals; and
- Representing tribal interests before the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty Implementation

The Pacific Salmon Treaty of 1985 provides for tribal policy representation at all levels of the Pacific Salmon Commission, which implements the treaty. NWIFC staff are involved in many aspects of the treaty's implementation. Activities included:

- Facilitating inter-tribal and inter-agency meetings, developing issue papers and negotiation options;
- Informing tribes and policy representatives on issues affected by the treaty implementation process;
- Serving on the Fraser sockeye and pink, chum, coho, chinook and data sharing technical committees, as well as other work groups and panels;
- Advising and facilitating development of management regimes by tribal and U.S. Section representatives of the bi-lateral Fraser Panel, which manages fisheries on Fraser River stocks; and
- Coordinating tribal research and data gathering activities associated with implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Habitat Services Division

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. The division monitors these issues and acts as an information clearinghouse. Activities in FY-97 included:

- Coordinating policy and technical level discussions between tribes and federal, state and local governments, and other interested parties;

- Coordinating, representing and monitoring tribal interests in the Timber/Fish/Wildlife process, Coordinated Tribal Water Quality and Ambient Monitoring programs, and Puget Sound Water Quality Authority management committees;
- Monitoring, analyzing and distributing technical information on habitat-related forums, programs and processes; and
- Implementing the Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Project.

Information and Education Services Division

The Information and Education Services Division provides comprehensive public relations and educational services to member tribes. Activities in FY-97 included:

- Producing news releases, newsletters, brochures, reports, curriculums, videos, photographs, exhibits and other materials to inform and educate the public about tribal natural resource management activities and objectives;
- Producing internal newsletters, background papers and other materials to help keep member tribes informed on topics of interest;
- Coordinating conferences and meetings;
- Responding to numerous public requests for information on the tribes and tribal natural resource management activities;
- Participating in cooperative natural resource education efforts and events; and
- Monitoring legislation and coordinating tribal input.

For More Information

For more information about the natural resource management activities of the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington, contact the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, WA 98516; or call (360) 438-1180. The NWIFC home page is available on the World Wide Web at <http://mako.nwifc.wa.gov>.